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SUBJECT: MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTY REACTIONS TO PARIS
CONSULTATIVE MEETING

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 159

¶1. (SBU) Reactions among the Mauritanian media and political class to the results of the February 20 OIF-led Consultative Committee Meeting in Paris were mixed, though most saw a small victory for the High State Council. The following is a sample of the reactions.

¶2. (U) Junta response: None of the official state-run media has reported or commented yet on the Paris consultative meeting.

¶3. (U) RFD response: Ahmed Ould Daddah's party released an approving communique February 21 in which it "noted with satisfaction the commitment of the international community... to search for a national consensus as the only way to restore constitutional order." The communique went on to "ask all national political actors to work for the success of this dialogue in the interests of Mauritania's national unity, security, and stability."

¶4. (C) RFD response continued: PolOff met RFD representative Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Weddady February 22. Weddady expressed his party's satisfaction at seeing their position reflected and recognized in the communique. He thought it was positive that the contact group acknowledged that there are three distinct factions in the crisis and gave them a last opportunity to negotiate. He said the group implicitly rejected General Aziz's unilateral plan and stressed the need for a consensual solution. Ould Weddady was confident that General Aziz will be forced to make a decision before the next deadline to either drop his candidacy or engage in dialogue.

¶5. (U) FNDD reaction: The FNDD released a communique stating that the "agenda of the military has been rejected" despite the High State Council's propensity to "distort the truth" and claim that the international community "has become more understanding of the August 6 coup d'etat." The communique noted that the Consultative Committee rejected any "unilateral steps" and that any election must be organized by "a neutral government."

¶6. (U) The anti-coup French-language "Le Renovateur" newspaper led with the headline "A Fragile Diplomatic Success

for the High State Council in Paris: Will the General be able to handle his advantage?" The article went on to say the military authorities could "rub their hands and congratulate themselves for having barely avoided the tightening vise of sanctions that the most well-informed observers regarded as all but inevitable."

¶7. (U) The strongly pro-coup French-language "Le Veridique" newspaper ran an editorial with the headline "A New Failure for the FNDD." Condemning the "propaganda machines" of the FNDD that "led one to believe February 20 would be the start of the apocalypse for Mauritania," the author stated "the internationalization of the crisis that the FNDD so much wanted, did not take place." Continuing the international theme, he went on to say "in the eyes of the international community, the National Dialogue on Democracy was considered a gesture of openness, as the ambassadors of France and Germany in Nouakchott have emphasized."

¶8. (U) The French-language "Nouakchott Info" newspaper led with the headline "Another reprieve!" The story characterized the Consultative Meeting results as "a reprieve by the international community that, while not a sign of best wishes towards the High State Council, at least waters down the international community's wine (i.e., is a concession)" by calling on all parties in Mauritania to dialogue.

¶9. (U) The Arabic-language "Al Akhbar" newspaper led with the headline "Another respite: Return to the Domestic Front." The front-page article stated: "The Mauritanian crisis has finally taken a path towards settlement, the

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outlines of which began to take shape after the international community unveiled a new roadmap as the framework for negotiating between the parties in the crisis... It is clear that the Consultative Committee statement outlined a new plan bringing together all the national initiatives announced thus far by the three sides: the ruling Council, the deposed President, and the opposition (RFD)."

¶10. (U) The anti-coup Arabic-language "Assirage" newspaper took a moderate position, characterizing the Consultative Committee's results as "a partial defeat for coup supporters, and a partial victory for the anti-coup front."

¶11. (U) The Arabic-language "El Emel El Jedid," "El Watan," and "El Vejr" newspapers all prominently featured a picture of Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi on the front page and emphasized the transfer of the Mauritanian crisis to mediation efforts to be led by Qadhafi.

¶12. (C) Comment: The prevailing consensus is that the High State Council obtained a small victory and bought yet more time to consolidate their position. The FNDD, while privately disappointed (Reftel), tried to put a good public face on the results. Most newspapers, however, were not convinced. In the Arabic press, the return of Qadhafi to the fore was a major theme, while the pro-coup partisans did not hesitate to use the French and German ambassadors' feeble condemnations (and sometimes even tacit support) of the coup to their advantage. End comment.

WALSH